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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR TO ECC: ON THE FRONTLINES OF ELECTION CREDIBILITY

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: On July 2, Ambassador Eikenberry and Ambassador Carney visited the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) and met with Chairman Grant Kippen and national commissioners Fahim Hakim and Maulawi Mustafa Barakzai. The Ambassador toured the ECC's Kabul headquarters and the co-located Kabul regional office and met international and Afghan ECC staff. In a private meeting with the commissioners, the Ambassador discussed the delayed set-up of ECC provincial offices, the importance of the ECC's mandate and the future of the institution. End Summary

Awaiting an Office, Creating a Presence

¶12. (U) Kippen explained the many difficulties that the ECC had faced during set-up due to delays in the UNDP procurement process, but believed that a solution was underway in finding locations for provincial offices. He thanked the Ambassador for his responsiveness on this issue. The ECC has agreed to co-locate with UNAMA in six provinces and with the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in an additional five. The ECC has now signed contracts for all but five provincial offices.

¶13. (U) To offset the delayed set-up, the ECC is encouraging its provincial staff to engage with the community to establish its presence. Kippen said that while the ECC is maintaining a distance from the PRTs to demonstrate impartiality and independence, it welcomes information on fraud or electoral violations. The ECC plans to have provincial offices operational by the third week of July, which will allow for a second round of training before surge of complaints expected in the build-up to and aftermath of election day.

Explaining the ECC Mission

¶14. (SBU) The ECC has established a complaint management database and will publish information on its website for transparency. To assist provincial staff, the ECC created an extensive handbook to assist with accepting complaints and conducting investigations. The ECC also plans to host an event for candidates to improve their understanding of the complaints process, highlighting the limited scope of the ECC's mandate and the standard of requiring evidence - not rumor - as the basis of complaints. As of the time of the meeting, the commissioners noted that the ECC had received over 60 complaints against provincial council candidates, but had not yet received complaints against presidential candidates. It has since received complaints from at least one presidential campaign (Ghani).

The Future of the ECC

15. (U) The Ambassador commended the commissioners for their work on the front lines of the credibility for the elections. Hakim noted the ECC's plans for the national commissioners to engage with media and visit provincial offices to raise awareness of the ECC mission. Barakzai thanked the Ambassador for his support for a fair, transparent and just election process, noting that an election must reflect the will of the people and cannot impose an unwelcome result.

16. (U) The Ambassador asked the commissioners for their vision of the future of the ECC and if the international composition weakened the institution. Barakzai believed that the international commissioners strengthened the ECC by providing additional capacity and helping the national commissioners withstand external pressures and influence. Kippen noted that while the ECC has three international and two national commissioners, the electoral law requires one national commissioner for quorum. Barakzai and Hakim concurred that a strengthened justice sector and court system could eventually fill the ECC's role. Until then, the ECC would continue providing a key electoral safeguard.

EIKENBERRY